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ABSTRACT

A partnership between the Universities of Exeter and Bournemouth at their joint University Centre in Yeovil College, Somerset (England) allowed local students to participate in higher education via a BA degree in Heritage and Regional Studies. This program represents several disciplines including history, literature, and the visual arts. It aims to provide a process whereby students obtain a better understanding of what might be termed "regionality"--an appreciation of how the identity of a specific place is constructed--and help develop students' transferable skills of teamwork, problem solving, and communication. One strategy employed to further these aims was the incorporation of an accredited study tour of heritage sites in Dorset, Devon, and Somerset during the summer of 1999. This paper first provides a historical context on the Battle of Sedgemoor, a battlefield site on the tour which was a marketing project of the Somerset Tourist Board in 1985. The paper analyzes the interpretation of the battle in terms of the Tourist Board campaign and discusses the reasons for its ultimate failure. It then provides suggestions which may influence future decisions on the choice of themes, stories, and messages and their likely impact upon visitor knowledge, attitudes, and behavior in relationship to the re-interpretation of Sedgemoor as a heritage resource. It comments briefly on the student experience of the study tour. (Contains 10 references.) (BT)

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SEDGEMOOR: A SUITABLE CASE FOR TREATMENT? HERITAGE, INTERPRETATION AND EDUCATIONAL PROCESS

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Introduction

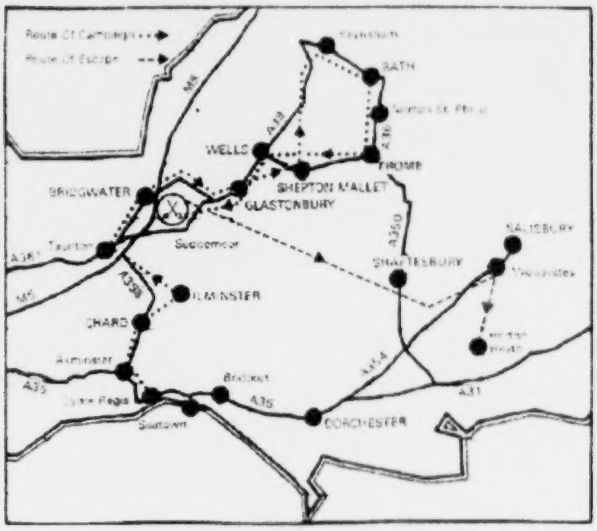
This paper results from a partnership between the Universities of Exeter and Bournemouth at their Joint University Centre in Yeovil College, Somerset, during the academic year 1998-9. At this Centre, some local students participate in higher education via a BA (Hons) Degree in Heritage and Regional Studies. A variety of disciplines are represented in this programme, including history, literature and the visual arts. Its aim is to provide a process whereby students obtain a better understanding of what might be termed 'regionality' and an appreciation of how the identity of a specific place is constructed. As an historian engaged in teaching part of the degree programme, I became interested in how such processes could be fostered whilst, at the same time, familiarising students with historical methods, concepts, and the practicalities of research. Since another aim of the degree is to help develop student's transferable skills of teamwork, problem solving, and all round communication, this provided an additional challenge to that of heritage based pedagogy.

One strategy employed to further these aims was the incorporation of an accredited study tour of heritage sites in Dorset, Devon and Somerset during the summer of 1999. The tour comprised five field trips during one week, after which students devised, negotiated and implemented a project of their own . This process enabled students to examine how heritage lends itself to the promotion of regional identity in its widest sense, and facilitated working together and individually in a variety of situations. Considerable research into the heritage resources of the region predated the tour, during which time I became aware of an initiative mounted by the Somerset Tourist Board in 1985, which used the tercentenary of the Battle of Sedgemoor as a marketing device. (GOULDSWORTHY, 1984). As will be seen, this initiative could be described as a failure in terms of the manufacture of heritage, but did have potential in enhancing people's awareness of their past. From an academic perspective, it related to Uzzell's concept of areas of conflict such as battlefield sites warranting more 'hot' than 'cold' interpretation (UZZELL, 1989); it illustrated how local memory and 'frameworks of meaning' might be perceived as a key interpretative resource (UZELL and BALLANTYNE, 1998; 18) and it provided a means by which a more appropriate, and unifying sense of place, both regional and European, could be envisaged.

This paper will, firstly, provide some historical context in relation to the topic to be explored. An analysis of the interpretation of the Battle of Sedgemoor in terms of the Tourist Board campaign, and the reasons for its ultimate failure will follow. It will then provide suggestions which may influence future' decisions ..concerning the choice of themes, stories and messages and their likely impact upon visitor knowledge, attitudes and behaviour' in relationship to the re-interpretation of Sedgemoor as a heritage resource (UZELL and BALLANTYNE, 1998: 2) and comment briefly on the student experience of the study tour.

Sedgemoor: the historical context

The Battle of Sedgemoor is often described as the last battle fought on English soil, comparable to that of the Scottish site of Culloden, fifty-one years later, which is seen as the last outbreak of formal warfare in Britain. Both battles have their origins in the political and religious conflicts which characterised the Civil War, and mark the end of the Stuart dynasty. Without Sedgemoor, the 'Glorious Revolution' of William of Orange in 1689, and the Whig ascendancy would have been a far more risky business; equally, the defeat of the highland army at Culloden by the 'Butcher' Duke of Cumberland ensured the Hanoverian succession. Both battles provided valuable experience for the embryo regiments which now characterise British military history and heritage. Both Sedgemoor and Culloden were commanded by *emigre* claimants to the throne and have been personified as young and dashing scions of the house of Stuart, although they failed in their attempts. They were, in 1685, James Scott, the Duke of Monmouth, and in 1746, Charles Stuart, better known as 'Bonnie Prince Charlie'. The aftermath of both battles was similar insofar as the fate of local populations were concerned; the highlands underwent a form of ethnic cleansing, the natives transported and estates sequestrated, whilst the 'Bloody Assizes' witnessed the brutal execution or transportation of over nine hundred of Monmouth's followers. Both battles have been popularly represented as being conflicts between peasant armies and the more technologically superior forces of the Crown, or as a manifestation of class warfare during the last stages of feudalism. However, whilst Culloden is one of the most visited heritage sites in Scotland (McCRONE, MORRIS AND KEILY, 1995; 149) relatively few venture to the battlefield at Sedgemoor. The popularity of Culloden is explained by the present day cultural and political meanings attached to it, in that it 'stands' for Scotland (MaCRONE *et al*, 1995: 195). Sedgemoor, however, has not acquired a regional 'patina' of heritage; that is, there appears to be no facility for Somerset or South-Western identity to be constructed along the same lines as that of Culloden. As will be seen, there are many practical and political reasons which account for Sedgemoor's relatively low profile within the context of Somerset - or the nation's heritage - and despite the efforts of the county Tourist Board to promote the tercentenary of the battle.



The campaign can be seen within the context of 'themed' or culturally aspirant tourism popular in the 1980's. In practice, the private sector was invited to exploit the opportunities afforded by the tercentenary under the slogan of 'Relive the Pitchfork Rebellion and Recapture the Past in Somerset'. The concept of the 'Pitchfork Rebellion' was not new, but a specially commissioned logo of a crossed billhook and a pitchfork emphasising the peasant nature of the rebel army was used throughout the campaign and appeared in a variety of publications and locations in Somerset and Dorset. By April, 1985, £10,000 obtained from sponsorship had boosted the Tourism Office's budget, allowing for the publication of interpretation boards situated in the villages along the route (the Monmouth 'trail') which Monmouth took after disembarking at Lyme Regis. Sponsors also financed a pamphlet for mass distribution (*The Road to Sedgemoor June-July 1685)* and a packed programme of cultural and more populist events was planned for the whole of the tourist season. The theme of the rebellion, pageantry and medieval displays culminated in the re-enactment of the battle by the Sealed Knot Society on the anniversary of the event in July. Local publishers brought out new histories of the rebellion, which was also promoted overseas by targetting the descendants of the transported rebels. All these events were masterminded by a working party representing the British and West Country Tourist Boards, contiguous Tourist Boards belonging to Devon and Dorset, local museums and the Somerset Education Department. Building on these links, and with an eye to the future, the working party recommended that

> 'as a matter of urgency, Somerset's local authorities examine the implications of providing a permanent visitor centre close by Westonzoyland and the site of the Battle of Sedgemoor in order to provide visitor information, and through modern display techniques, interpret the historical context of the Rebellion and its aftermath... a

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> pedestrian route to the battleground site.. a walk round the village to include the church and the Inn ... signposted vehicular access, 100 capacity car park and toilets, markers and information boards at the site of the battle...and permanent exhibition and interpretation facilities at locations elsewhere in the county...Taunton and Bridgwater are obvious examples....A permanent waymarked 'Rebellion Trail' prepared for the car borne tourist by arrangement with Dorset, Devon and Avon authorities would commence at Lyme Regis and follow the Duke of Monmouth's route.....'
> (GOULDSWORTHY, 1984) (see map)

However, although a large amount of extra traffic visited Somerset in 1985, the county council did not implement the recommendations, and the opportunity to develop the heritage potential of the Pitchfork Rebellion foundered. Almost fifteen years after the tercentenary, the battlefield remains accessible by a farm road in bad repair, commemorated by a memorial erected in 1928 and an interpretation board showing the disposition of the two armies. The 'Heritage Trail' in Taunton does include a pause at the Market Cross where Monmouth raised his standard, and also features the role of the Castle as a rebel prison and Assize court. However, Somerset tourist publicity records little more than the site and the date of the battle, whilst its Web site contains two brief paragraphs on Sedgemoor, including an apocryphal story of Queen Victoria pulling down the blinds of her railway carriage when approaching 'rebel' Bridgwater. Although a 28 mile 'Liberty Trail' was created through the villages providing Monmouth's recruits, this was at best a *niche* marketing device, aiming to attract those contemplating walking holidays in the South West. It can therefore be suggested that there were few lasting outcomes from the Pitchfork Rebellion marketing campaign; today, tourism in Somerset is largely sustained by the attractions of the Exmoor National Park, Glastonbury, and Cheddar Gorge.

Reasons for failure

Turning now to an analysis of why the initiative failed, at least in the medium term, it could be argued that 'themed heritage' was *deja vu* by the 1990's, or that the many tourists who visited the region were not interested in events of a high cultural order. Whilst Sealed Knot enactments are popular, it could be argued that this is due to their being visual and active spectacles, which are by themselves of a transitory nature. Glastonbury's popularity does not rest on the Abbey, but on Arthurian legends, its pop festival and New Age tourism, together with the discount 'shopping village' at nearby Street. 'Historic ' Somerset is represented at Bath and Wells, but the history of the Rebellion in or around both places does not signify in comparison to that of Roman or 'Cathedral' Britain. It might be argued, however, that the campaign could have encouraged tourism *within* the region, since it functioned as consciousness raising agency for the local population as a whole. It might equally be argued that the Pitchfork Rebellion was 'seen' by local communities as a superficial marketing exercise, who, although willing to take advantage of the short term benefits afforded by the campaign, disliked its manufactured aspects and would have preferred its commemoration in other ways. As such, the opportunity to build on local interest, goodwill and identity was dissipated. Certainly the Battle of

Sedgemoor, and in particular, its bloody aftermath, exists in popular memory in the South West, and upon which a different kind of campaign might have been built.

Sedgemoor and popular culture

There are many examples of how the rebellion has entered into the popular culture of Somerset and the adjacent counties. A number of old inn signs in the region commemorate the events of 1685, from the Monmouth Inn at Lyme Regis to the Stonegallows Inn and district in Taunton. This district is situated on the route along which Judge Jeffreys rode to try the Somerset rebels (Jeffreys Way). After the Bloody Assize had taken place, a gibbet was erected on a stone foundation strong enough to sustain the weight of multiple hangings. Tangier, another Taunton district, was named after Colonel Kirk's regiment who had seen service in Tangiers, and who had 'a fearsome reputation for savagery' (CLARKE, 1984: 36) In Bridgwater, Bovet Street commemorates the name of an executed rebel. A permanent memorial exists in the form of a tiled mural of the battle in a Taunton market precinct, although it is not included in the town's Heritage Trail (a similar and less well-executed version, also funded by private enterprise, is situated in the foyer of the Kings' Sedgemoor Service Station on the northbound M4). The superscription on the mural, written by the county historian in 1992, illustrates an interesting exercise in corporate public relations:

> 'Taunton, a town of prosperous cloth workers and a centre of religious and political dissent gave strong support to the Duke of Monmouth in his attempt to overthrow King James 11 in 1685. Enough recruits came forward to form the Blue Regiment under Colonel Richard Bovet and some 800 Tauntonians fought at the Battle of Sedgemoor on 6th July. The town was the first to hear Monmouth proclaimed King, and a group of Taunton schoolgirls presented him with a banner, a sword and a bible. On James 11's orders they were later arrested and held to ransom for their boldness. After the battle the town suffered from the rough attentions of Colonel Kirk's regiment, and the Lord Chief Justice Jeffreys sat in judgement on the captured rebels in Taunton Castle in September. He dealt with 514 prisoners of whom 144 were sentenced to be hanged and 284 condemned to transportation. Some Taunton folk were perhaps fortunate to have died in battle, but some survived the rigours of virtual slavery in the West Indies and escaped to freedom and liberty in the American colonies'

Sedgemoor, popular memory and heritage interpretation

If the Monmouth rebellion remains alive in popular memory, if not as a significant part of Somerset heritage, it might be argued that many of its inhabitants were alienated by the way in which the campaign was sanitised for public consumption. Some mention was made in the Pitchfork Rebellion pamphlet of the fate of those involved who suffered the full penalties for treason (partial hanging, disembowelling and quartering; the entrails burnt, the remains par-boiled and publicly displayed).

However, the *minutiae* of execution was largely ignored in favour of euphemisms, as was the nature of the treatment meted out by James 11's victorious army captains on Monmouth's supporters The indiscriminate slaughter of the rebels after the rebellion was lost was also under-stated. The popular memory of the Monmouth Rebellion, therefore, may not coincide with most of the official interpretations offered. If so, the problem remains as to how to redress the balance in the interests of the historical record, and to create a new discourse which would be of more relevance to local communities. There might also be some merit in attempting to address the 'mythology' of a peasant army set against the might of a ruler *in situ*. Just as it has been argued that Culloden rests on the myth of an English-Scottish confrontation rather than the contextual reality of a Scottish civil war (McCRONE *et al*, 1995:195), it has been suggested that many of Monmouth's followers were of the urban, or 'middling sort' (EARLE, 1977) and therefore could not be described as peasants. Although some of the arms used in the battle were adapted from scythes and billhooks, the rebel army was more generally equipped with swords and musketry, cannon and cavalry. This begs the question as to how the site might have been interpreted if the Tourist Board's visitor centre had become a reality? Here, I will argue that regional and political, as opposed to historical, realities could have informed the subsequent interpretation in the interests of the wider community.

Peasant armies, history and mythology

The history of the Celtic fringes of the British isles is often one of conflict, and the South-West is no exception. Some of the worst excesses of the Civil War took place in Devon, and Monmouth was not the only claimant to the throne who marched through the West Country. Whilst it is probable that many of the protagonists could be described as peasants during the medieval period, we have seen that the term is not really applicable to the majority of Monmouth's supporters. Even so, it would be tempting for a visitor centre to depict Sedgemoor along the same lines as the 1985 publicity campaign, especially since, as Samuel and Thompson claim (SAMUEL AND THOMPSON, 1990) there is normally a kernel of truth which underpins popular mythology in addition to the evidence of contemporary and more recent sources. If Monmouth's troops were his dupes rather than partners in upholding the 'good old' Protestant cause, then their simplicity and lack of political 'nous' is more than likely to be associated with rural backwardness. From alternative perspective, the more politically aware peasant armies appear to be, the more credibility can be attached to certain schools of historical interpretation. It might have benefited the victorious army to depict the vanquished as being peasants, unworthy opponents and ignorant in matters of modern warfare, although the result of the battle was by no means a foregone conclusion. Thus, the issue of historical accuracy could be sacrificed in favour of a sympathetic portrayal of 'lost Somerset'. Whatever the truth about the peasant character of Monmouth's army may be, it could provide a modern representation of regional identity and disadvantage.

Moreover, there is a precedent in existence which justifies a peasant-based rationale for Sedgemoor interpretation. Variations on the 'peasant revolt' theme in the South-West have drawn attention to this aspect of their heritage but by more overtly nationalist displays. I refer to the commemorations of the

1497 Angove rising and the 1549 'Prayer Book' rebellion in Cornwall, which were characterised by marches to London and Exeter in 1997 and 1999 respectively. In these instances, it is possible to argue that by capitalising on the events of 1685, some dynamic for change may be realisable, particularly in terms of reconstructing regional and cultural identities, economies, and a sense of 'place'.

Sedgemoor: towards an alternative discourse

There are many ways in which public consciousness regarding Sedgemoor and its regional identity can be raised, and its contribution to the 'idea' of the West Country enhanced. Some are immediately achievable, given enough political will and a modest amount of funding, others are more difficult to accomplish. This section will discuss both achievable and less achievable strategies, and identify the obstacles which prevent further development.

As the students on the study tour suggested, more and better publicity outlets are essential. A more expensive, but necessary element in the development of the site would be to improve public access. However, as with many other British battlefields, Sedgemoor is situated on private land, which does cause problems regarding access. Should the site become available on the open market, the local authority is empowered to refuse development 'if it would harm the historic structure, character, principal components or setting' of the battlefield itself (BARNETT: 1981) but it does acknowledge its national importance. Given the ambitious proposals of the 1984 working party, then, it might be possible to assume that they remain in abeyance rather than being entirely abandoned.

It might also be possible to convince the county archaeologists to excavate the site, since it is known that the bodies of hundreds of rebels were hastily interred there after the battle. However, the disturbance of human remains on battle sites remains a contested issue, and a specific regulatory framework exists for such purposes. According to English Heritage guidelines, extensive funding would be required in order to 'contextualise the results' of any excavation undertaken, and one unavoidable outcome would be the destruction of the site contents (ENGLISH HERITAGE, 1997: 10). Nevertheless, there have been occasions when war graves have been excavated, as in the recent case of the victims of the Battle of Towton (1461). Similar reasons which were offered in justification of the Towton excavation could also apply to Sedgemoor, such as an appraisal of the role, conduct and effectiveness of troops in early modern England, the development of battlefield surgery, and experience of the 'actual battle itself, stripped of all its...propaganda' (*Independent*, 1999). It may also be possible to establish the 'peasant' character of the rebel army in terms of bone density on arms and backs, and the health and dietary deficiencies of the period in question. It could be argued, therefore, that Sedgemoor could be a suitable case for archaeological exploration, especially since it would fulfil some of the English Heritage funding requirements. These are to remedy a 'weakness in the archaeological record' particularly relating to 'post medieval traditions 1300-1700 AD', and to explain 'substantive changes in the condition of the urban and rural poor' of this period (ENGLISH HERITAGE, 1997: 45) Archaeological research would also benefit by the application of prospecting

techniques in the peat wetlands where Sedgemoor is located, DNA studies and fieldwork recording methods. The accessibility of information obtained from such an excavation would thus merit the construction of a heritage interpretation centre. As Uzzell has claimed, a more 'honest representation of the more shameful events of the past' might also be achieved (Uzzell, 1989: 46).

This issue leads to further speculation on the less achievable possibilities for development, some of which are interlinked with other aspects of battlefield heritage. For example, the nearby site of the Battle of Langport, together with those of proximate Civil War conflicts in Devon (Geat Torrington) might be publicised in conjunction with Sedgemoor. Other themed linkages in the South West (specifically with Tolpuddle, in Dorset) might be made in relationship to the experience of transportation and the history of the labour movement.. These linkages would, however, require more regional co-operation than seems to be the case at present. More ambitious linkages might be made with the Netherlands, in order to exploit the 'Orange' (and European Protestant) heritage, including 'twinning' where appropriate. Such initiatives would tap local, national and international interest. Finally, a new statue or memorial of the events of 1685 might be commissioned in the Sedgemoor area, as was erected in the Cornish village of St. Keverne, at the starting point of the Angove rebellion. This memorial functions as a powerful symbol of Cornish identity, but it was not built without considerable opposition. It is here where the feasibility of developing Sedgemoor along the lines suggested may be questioned, since English political culture appears hostile to the commemoration of treasonable acts such as rebellions, or rather, those on the losing side. It might be argued that the existing memorial on the battlefield suffices, although on closer inspection it appears to commemorate the role of the Somerset Light Infantry in the battles of Sedgemoor, Plassey, Quebec, Waterloo and in both world wars, as much as those buried in the battlefield.

Sedgemoor and educational process

Students who investigated this topic often found difficulty in maintaining objectivity when engaging with primary source materials concerning the 'martyrology' of the Bloody Assize victims. Nevertheless, the discipline of weighing the evidence from anti-Jacobean propagandists (subsequently repeated by some historians), popular memory and accounts of the realities of seventeenth century warfare proved to be academically beneficial. One student project also evaluated Sedgemoor museology, which appeared to indicate its partisan nature. Although the County Museum (the repository for artefacts of the Somerset Light Infantry) mounted a large exhibition on Sedgemoor in 1985, the contents of one display case now function as the interpretative medium. Conversely, the Admiral Blake Museum in Bridgwater has one room dedicated to the rebellion, including a video recording of the Sealed Knot enactment which describes the Bloody Assizes as being 'judicial butchery'. The explanation for this interpretation may be related to the fact that Blake, a 'famous son' of Bridgwater was also a Civil War veteran.

In fact, these contesting interpretations serve to illustrate the institutional obstacles – military, judicial, royal - which prevent Sedgemoor from becoming a heritage site. In the West country, the Civil War

and Stuart family history are subjects of great sensitivity, even after three hundred years, so the lack of political will necessary to disturb the historical landscape of Sedgemoor is perhaps understandable. This is in marked contrast to the situation pertaining in the Celtic fringes of Britain, where the Civil War and its after-effects are deeply ingrained in public consciousness, and are certainly more 'honestly' portrayed and interpreted. The question remains as to whether it is better for Britain's long term political integrity to ignore the issues which underlie Sedgemoor interpretation, or to positively promote the site as a centre for regional revival. As Colley implies, the discarding of the 'imposition of English cultural uniformity' (COLLEY, 1996: 394) will provide the ultimate educational challenge.

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